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The low level of achievement motivation in lower-class adolescents and the higher incidence of dropouts are seen to be related not only to economic impoverishment, but to a lack of achievement-oriented role models among significant others frequently encountered by such children. The sample was composed of 10th grade boys with IQ scores from 105-112. A questionnaire gathered data. In general, the hypothesized relationships are observed in the data, but statistically significant support is given the two following hypotheses: (1) lower-class boys with a high level of educational aspiration are less likely than middle class boys with high aspirations to select family members as role models, and (2) lower class boys with a low level of educational aspiration are more likely than similarly disposed middle-class boys to see family members as role models. (BP)

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SOCIAL CLASS, ROLE MODELS, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS, AND THE LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION

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SOCIAL CLASS, ROLE MODELS, SIGNIFICANT OTHERS AND THE LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATION[1] *

Introduction

One of the major concerns in public education for the last two decades has been the so-called dropout problem -- the phenomenon of students leaving school before they have completed the amount of formal education indicated by their ability. One reason for our growing concern about dropout is that, as Porter (1965) has noted, in an increasingly technological society, a larger and ever-increasing proportion of the productive population must be highly trained in very complex skills. There is less and less place for unskilled labourers in the productive segment of any modern industrial society; in fact, the unskilled become more and more dependent, and less and less productive.

There is no doubt that the segment of society which has the highest incidence of adolescent dropout (and hence, adult dependency) is the lower class segment. In the recognition of their needs, and in recognition of society's need of their trained capacities as well, scholarships, family allowances to parents of children who remain in attendance at school, and similar incentives have been offered by governments to make prolonged school attendance economically feasible for more adolescents. And yet, dropout persists.

It is true that a major problem for lower-class students is the economic one; however, it has been convincingly demonstrated by Elder (1963) that more important in its contribution to the high rate of dropout lower-class students is the lack of achievement orientation in the educational context. Although individual exceptions are fortunately numerous, it can be stated in general that the lower the social class of the student, the lower the level of educational aspiration.

The low level of achievement motivation in lower-class adolescents that we are referring to has already been studied from a variety of points of view, and can be related to some known factors. For example, it has frequently been demonstrated that IQ tests (Charters, 1963) are culturally biased in favour of middle-class children, so that lower-class children of intelligence equal to that of middle-class children will sometimes be placed in lower academic groups or streams because of this bias. Impoverished background experiences have also been shown to be related to the lower levels of academic achievement of lower-class children (Passow et al., 1963, 1966), and consistently low achievement in school also lowers aspirations. Preferential treatment of middle-class students by teachers and the principal was noted by Hollingshead (1949). Dahlke (1956) has documented the inferiority of educational equipment and supplies that is often allocated to lower-class children.

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*CCRE is pleased to bring you this paper. The ideas expressed are those of the authors.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify the many other similar circumstances which have been demonstrated to have a depressing influence on the achievement motivation of lower-class children.

This paper will attempt to shed some light on the lower achievement motivation of lower-class children by looking at the cost of high motivation in terms of the possible necessity to reject one's own family. In very simple terms, it is probably difficult for middle-class children not to conform to the norm of having high levels of educational aspiration, because low levels of aspiration require them to deny the expectations and values of their own families (the hippie phenomenon is a middle-class manifestation of one kind of denial). Conversely, we wish to explore whether it is difficult for working-class children to have high levels of educational aspiration because of the cost in almost certain isolation from their group. In a sense, we are attempting to apply the concept of "marginal man" (Becker, 1956) in an educational context.

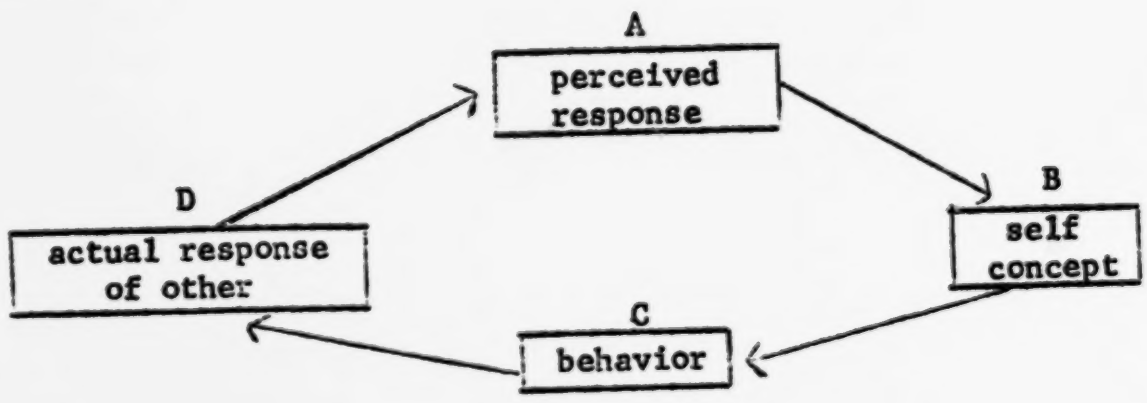
We propose to examine whether or not, by comparison to middle-class students, achievement-oriented, lower-class students may tend to turn outside the family for significant others and role models. The assumptions are that the lower-class family generally does not have the previous experience or knowledge to provide the striving student with adequate academic information, guidance, and example; its members cannot be considered models of success in our competitive economic society. The lower-class student with high academic aspirations, therefore, would have to look to members of non-family groups to find individuals to serve as role models and significant others.

The Sample

The sample under consideration was drawn from a questionnaire study completed by all grade eight and grade ten students and their teachers in attendance on the day of its administration in 39 public schools in the Province of Quebec. The questionnaires were distributed in May of 1965. The schools selected represent all major national, religious, economic and geographic groups and regions in the province. For this paper only, grade ten boys with an IQ from 105-112 were drawn from the larger sample of 6,465 subjects. This limitation of sample was made to reduce the variance in other factors -- sex, grade level and IQ -- already known to be related to one of our key variables, the level of educational aspiration (LEA).

Theoretical Background

The basic model used is the interaction model first proposed in detail by Mead (1934) and which has been presented graphically by Kinch (1963) as follows:



In some modification of Kinch's outline, our use of this model is based on the following postulates: First, that the individual's behavior is based on his perception of the responses (A) of other people whom he considers important or worthy of consideration; this response may be either an expectation for behavior, in which case it functions in part as an external social pressure, or as an evaluation, in which case it contributes to the individual's perception of himself (self-concept). Second, that the self-concept (B) (a "looking-glass self" which is mirrored in the perceived responses of others) gives rise to behavior (C) which is consistent with its own characteristics. Third, that the quality of behavior (C) influences the actual response of other (D). Fourth, that the actual response of other is converted into a perceived response (A) of the subject, and so on in a circular manner. Kinch suggests that the perception of the responses of these important people is related to their actual responses.

The "other" (who may be an individual or a collective) has been discussed sociologically in terms of reference groups by Merton and Kitt (1952) and by Kelley (1952). Taking our basic ideas from their sources in this paper, we think of "other" in two distinct senses: first, "other" as role model and second, "other" as significant other.

When the "other" serves as a role model, there need not necessarily be any direct interaction with him. There is, however, imitation on the part of the learner (the self, in Kinch's diagram). The role model in this regard is frequently thought of in terms of someone the learner "would like to be like". Where interaction between the individual and the role model does occur, it usually has a strong, affective element; this makes family members ideal as role models in our society which defines affection as important in the family. On the other hand, relationships with the significant other, a person whose opinion is considered worthy of consideration, are usually more cognitive and evaluative. The significant other is influential in certain well-defined circumstances with the relationship usually one of definite social counter positions, structuring interaction and involving expectations, evaluations, and sanctions. The same individual, however, (a teacher or a parent, for example), may be both a role model and a significant other.

The self-concept is not thought of as a unitary concept in this paper. The self is conceptualized as being composed of several elementary selves. One's academic self-concept, for example, is only one part of the total self-concept. The level of motivation is also considered to be an integral part of the total self-concept (Secord and Backman, 1964).

The social structure directly influences the development of the self by determining the frequencies of interaction between self and others, placing the self in various role categories, and influencing the behavior of the other toward the self (Secord and Backman, 1964). In this way a structural variable such as social class has considerable influence on the formation of the self. This is why we are positing social class level as an important contextual variable which should modify the influence of particular role models and significant others on the level of educational aspiration.

Previous Findings

a. Significant Others

Previous research findings have demonstrated the heuristic value of Mead's model of social interaction. Mead thought of the response of the other as the key to the development of the self. Miyamoto (1956) and Quarantelli (1966) empirically tested the influence of significant others in shaping self-definitions. In their studies, they used group and individual self-ratings on some specific skill, such as leadership ability, intelligence, and self-confidence. They found that the mean of the actual responses of the others to the subject were higher for those persons with a high self-rating than for those with a low self-rating. Self-concept, however, was found to be closer to the mean <u>perceived</u> response of the significant others than to the mean <u>actual</u> response of the significant others. Although the actual response is the stimulus which gives rise to the perceived response, the two are not necessarily identical, and it is the latter which influences the developing and ever-changing self-concept.

Experimental studies have also shown that by changing the evaluation of a significant other the self-conception of the subject is changed. Maehr (1962) and Videbeck (1960) found in laboratory studies that the approving and disapproving reaction of certain significant others to the performance of a skill were followed by corresponding increases and decreases in the subject's evaluation of self with respect to that skill and other related areas. Brookover (1965) experimentally demonstrated that by raising the parents' evaluations of their children as students, the student's academic self-concept was also raised. No attempt was made to distinguish those parents who were thought of by their children as significant others or as role models in these studies.

Brookover (1964) and Pedersen (1966) have shown that the student's self-concept of ability to do school work is related to his level of educational aspiration. It has also been demonstrated (Elder, 1963 and Pedersen, 1966) that the lower the socio-economic status, the lower the academic self-concept, and the lower the level of educational aspiration of the student. But as Super (1957) and Porter (1965) have so convincingly argued, formal education is becoming the almost exclusive means of upward social mobility for lower-class children, especially boys. Hence, it seems that upward social mobility which requires a high level of educational aspiration will also require the working-class boy to reject these patterns of his social class group, and may require him to turn his back on his family. Perhaps this explains why research by Pedersen (1966) and Rosenthal (1967) suggests that the teacher, as significant other, has more influence on the lower-class child than on the middle-class student. By contrast, Elder (1963) found that "the upwardly mobile boy in the middle-class family is strongly oriented toward his parent in values and seeks their advice and opinions on both daily and long-range matters". (pp. 217-218) These findings lead us to predict that upwardly mobile boys may reject family members as role models and as significant others.

Operational Definition of Variables

The social class of the student was determined by teacher-estimate. Those students planning to go to college were considered as having high levels of aspiration, those planning to finish high school or less, low. The selection of role model was made by the student, who indicated from a checklist which of

nine categories of people, both family and non-family members, he would most like to be "somewhat like". Similar checklists were presented for questions concerning the identification of the individuals who had been most influential in educational choices in the past, and which persons they would go to in the future if they needed educational advice.

The actual questions used to obtain the variables analyzed in this study appear in Appendix A.

Method of Analysis:

The data relating to the hypotheses presented below were arranged into cross-tabulations, and the chi-square test was used to determine if the relationships should be considered significant. For this paper the .05 level of confidence was accepted as statistically significant, but the actual probabilities are reported in the event that the reader would prefer to select some other level of confidence.

The reader is reminded that IQ, grade level, and sex have already been controlled in the selection of the sample.

Hypotheses and Findings

Previous findings already referred to above suggest that lower-class family members generally do not provide adequate models of middle-class success. The middle-class family, on the other hand, has achieved a certain measure of success and can be looked up to as a source of role models for the individual who is serious about education.

Hypothesis 1. By comparison with middle-class students, lower-class students with high levels of educational aspiration are less likely to indicate that family members, rather than non-family members, are role models.

Table 1

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS ROLE MODELS BY MIDDLE AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

	Role Models		
Social Class Level	Non-Family	Family	Total
Middle	54%	46%	74
Lower Class	72%	28%	47
		Chi square = 4.2 $p<.05$	

The figures in TABLE 1 show that, of boys with high LEA's, 46 per cent of middle-class boys as compared to only 28 per cent of working-class boys indicate that they would most like to be like members of their own families. This difference is significant at the .05 level of confidence. Hypothesis 1 is supported.

It would seem that, almost by definition, working-class students with low levels of aspiration are not planning to try to be very different from their parents -- at least not in an educational sense. This, and our previous arguments, lead to the second hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. By comparison with middle-class students, lower-class students with low LEA's are more likely to indicate that family members, rather than non-family members, are role models.

TABLE 2

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS ROLE MODELS BY MIDDLE-CLASS AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH LOW LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

	Role Models		
Social Class Level	Non-Family	Family	Total
Middle Class	76%	24%	34
Lower Class	72%	28%	32

Chi square - 0.3; p<.70

Although the per cents in TABLE 2 indicate that 28 per cent of lower-class boys with low LEA's as compared to 24% of middle-class boys in the same category indicate family members as role models, the difference is not significant statistically. Hypothesis 2 is not supported by our data.

Interesting comparisons can be drawn by looking at the two tables simultaneously for each social class level. When doing this for middle-class boys, one notes that the per cent of middle-class boys with high LEA's selecting family members as role models is 46 per cent as compared to only 24 per cent of middle-class boys with low LEA's. This difference is statistically significant (chi square = 4.8; p<.05). But the same comparison for lower-class boys at the two LEA's shows exactly the same per cent selecting non-family members as role models, which weakens our argument. We expected that there would be higher rejection of families as sources of role models for lower-class boys with high LEA's than for lower-class boys with low LEA's. But our data support the conclusion that, regardless of LEA, lower-class high school boys are more likely to reject family members as role models than middle-class boys.

Lower-class boys are assumed to have a smaller range of human resources in their social environment of a type that could provide them with information about educational matters. This is because by comparison to middle-class parents, their own parents have probably had very little experience in the world of education, especially higher education. Therefore, we would expect

that the lower-class child who has a high LEA would be more likely than the middle-class child to seek out the teacher rather than his parents for advice. This reasoning is based on the argument we presented earlier, when we stated that significant others are likely to be cognitive and evaluative, and to be influential in social counter-positions. For the lower-class child, the teacher is more likely to "know the score" and seem really competent to evaluate his academic ability than the parent. Relating our argument to Kinch's model, we expect that it is the perceived response of non-family members that will have an influence on the self-concept of the working class student because the teacher's opinions are more worthy, more likely to be based on expert information. Putting it in simple language, if the working class student has an academic self-concept that he is willing to bet the risk of failure in college on, he is more likely to have obtained it from his teacher than from his parents.

Hypothesis 3. By comparison with middle-class students, lower-class students with high LEA's are less likely to indicate that family members rather than non-family members are significant others.

TABLE 3

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS BY MIDDLE AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

Social Class Level	Significant Others		Total
	Non-Family	Family	
Middle Class	47%	53%	74
Lower Class	55%	45%	47
		Chi square = 0.6; $p<.50$	

The data in TABLE 3 do not support the hypothesis. Although the trends are in the direction predicted, that is, a majority of middle-class boys with high LEA's select family members as significant others whereas a majority of working-class boys in the same category select non-family members, the differences are not large enough to be statistically significant with a sample of this size.

Lower-class children with low levels of educational aspiration are assumed to be more like their parents than those with high levels of educational aspiration. Since they are not planning to go to college in any case, they are assumed to have less interest in the opinions of non-family members (such as teachers) than in those of their family. On the other hand, middle-class children with low levels of aspiration are probably unlike their family and are, therefore, more likely to have selected non-family than family significant others with regard to past educational choices. This reasoning leads to Hypothesis 4.

Hypothesis 4. By comparison with middle-class students, lower-class students with low LEA's are more likely to indicate family members rather than non-family members as significant others.

TABLE 4

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS SIGNIFICANT OTHERS BY MIDDLE AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH LOW LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

	Significant Others		
Social Class Level	Non-Family	Family	Total
Middle Class	71%	29%	34
Lower Class	47%	53%	32
		Chi square = 4.1; $p<.05$	

Table 4 supports Hypothesis 4. Fifty-three per cent of working-class boys with low LEA indicate that family members have been their most important educational advisors in the past, whereas only 29 per cent of middle-class boys in the same category so indicate. This suggests that in terms of likely social mobility, the selection of family as educational advisors is likely to lead downward for lower-class boys, but upward for middle-class boys.

Again, comparison of figures in both Tables 3 and 4 suggest that the difference in family-non-family members as significant others for boys at different levels of aspiration is much stronger for middle than for working class boys.

Arguments identical to those which precede Hypothesis 3 lead us to postulate the following:

Hypothesis 5. By comparison with middle-class students lower-class students with high LEA's are less likely to indicate family members than non-family members as future significant others.

TABLE 5

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS FUTURE SIGNIFICANT OTHERS BY MIDDLE AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH HIGH LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

	Future Significant Others		
Social Class Level	Non-Family	Family	Total
Middle Class	77%	23%	74
Lower Class	79%	21%	34
		Chi square = 1.1; $p<.30$	

There is no support for the hypothesis in the data presented in Table 5, but again, the per cents are in the direction predicted. Of boys with high levels of aspiration, 23 per cent of middle-class boys select family, whereas only 21 per cent of lower-class boys do. But this small difference is not statistically significant. The most striking feature of Table 5 is the large decrease of boys in either group who indicate an intention to select family members as significant others in the future. Inspection of the data (not presented here) shows that the large proportion of students in high school have been influenced by parents and class-room teachers in the past, but intend in the future to obtain advice and information from guidance counselors. In fact, the availability of guidance counselors in schools designated officially for the purpose of advising sets them up as the ideal counter-role, and this seems to be widely recognized by students regardless of social class or level of aspiration.

The final hypothesis, based on arguments that precede Hypothesis 4, is stated as follows:

Hypothesis 6. By comparison with middle-class students lower-class students with low LEA's are more likely to indicate family members than non-family members as future significant others.

TABLE 6

SELECTION OF FAMILY AND NON-FAMILY MEMBERS AS FUTURE SIGNIFICANT OTHERS BY MIDDLE AND LOWER-CLASS BOYS WITH LOW LEVELS OF ASPIRATION

	Future Significant Others		
Social Class Level	Non-Family	Family	Total
Middle Class	83%	17%	34
Lower Class	81%	19%	31*
		Chi square = 0.1; p<.80	

*One non-response in this category

For the same reasons as stated following Table 5, the data in Table 6 do not support the hypothesis; although the per cents are in the direction predicted, the differences are not statistically significant.

Conclusions

Findings. In general, the analysis supports the assumptions behind the hypotheses in this study; in no case was the distribution of responses in a direction contrary to the one hypothesized. In particular, the data provide statistically significant support for the two following relationships: first, lower-class boys with a high level of educational aspiration are less likely than middle-class boys with high aspirations to select family members as role models; second, lower-class boys with a low level of educational aspiration are more likely than similarly disposed middle-class boys to indicate that family members have been significant others in their past educational planning.

It seems that family influence is a negative force for lower-class boys in terms of educational planning, whereas the opposite appears to be true for middle-class boys. Lower-class boys who want to "get somewhere" (which in our society inevitably implies going to college), had better not model themselves on their parents.

Implications. Since the theoretical framework of this study was useful in making predictions that were supported by the data, the study attests to the heuristic value of reference-group and role theories.

Among the implications of the study is that in expecting lower-class boys to take advantage of scholarships and other educational opportunities, we may also be expecting them to deny the value of members of their families as examples to be emulated or to reject the importance of their expectations.

In our tendency to criticize lower-class children for not being strongly motivated to do school work, we probably do not take into consideration the costs of high aspirations to these children.

In terms of practical implications for educational policy, our findings can be interpreted as adding support to the idea of compensatory education for socio-economically disadvantaged students. If we evaluate the equality of educational opportunity on the basis of the achievement by all groups of students of the manifest goals of public education (rather than on the legalistic basis of equal inputs), we may in fact find it necessary to allocate more than a merely "fair share" of the public resources to the education of this particular group in order to help them to overcome the greater difficulties associated with the completion of higher education for them.

In an earlier part of this paper, we referred to the lower-class segment of the student body as the chief source of new supply of highly trained personnel. If our society really needs the trained capacities of lower-class boys, it may have to be prepared to pay more for their development than at present.

We must also be prepared to ask ourselves questions such as these: Is it fair to push these students? How far? Are we asking more of them than we have a right to ask? Should lower-class students be made aware of the likely costs of high motivation in terms of family rejection, later marginal social status, and so on?

Suggestions for further research. There are several weaknesses in this study which future research projects should be designed to avoid. For one thing, we almost certainly have a less representative sample of lower-class than of middle-class boys, because a higher rate of dropout for lower-class boys had already been in effect when the data were collected.

Another weakness is that we studied only boys; but it is very likely that lower-class girls are an even greater source of untrained talent than lower-class boys. Therefore, factors related to the level of educational aspiration for girls should also be studied.

The sample used in this study was rather small, and socially restricted. Future efforts should attempt to use not only larger samples, but also samples representative of more groups such as Catholics, rural students, and others not included in the sample of this study.

A final caution is in order. We have generalized rather freely, on the assumption that the rejection of family members as role models and significant others specifically in educational matters is associated with a general rejection of family members in other spheres. This assumption may well be unjustifiable and this deserves further investigation.

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APPENDIX A

Items from the Teacher's Questionnaire

2. The sex of this student is
   A. male
   B. female

8. Where would you rank this student's family in terms of social class level?
   A. upper class, or upper middle class
   B. middle class
   C. Working class

Items from the Student's Questionnaire

22. Now, considering your ability and financial limitations, how far do you think you will PROBABLY go before you finish your schooling?
   A. I shall probably finish grade eight
   B. I shall probably finish grade nine
   C. I shall probably finish grade ten
   D. I shall probably finish high school
   E. I expect to attend college for one year
   F. I expect to attend college for two years
   G. I shall probably complete four years of college
   H. I expect to continue in college even after I have finished four years

30. Most young people really admire and want to be somewhat like some other person. If you had one wish to be more like some ONE other person, who would you choose? After you have thought about your choice, try to decide which ONE category below best describes this person, even if no category is exactly appropriate.

A. my father
B. my mother
C. one of my teachers
D. an older brother or sister
E. some other relative
F. a person who is not a relative, but who knows me
G. a living person who does not know me very well
H. a living person who does not know me at all
I. a famous person from history
J. a famous person from the Bible or from my religion

32. Of the persons ON THIS LIST ONLY, which ONE do you think has probably influenced you the most about what subjects you should study, or what courses you should take in high school or college? Remember, choose only ONE answer, and limit your choice to the people on this list.
A. a teacher
B. a guidance or vocational counselor
C. mother
D. father
E. older brother or sister
F. some other relative
G. friend your age
H. friend older than you
I. minister, priest, or rabbi
J. community leader, such as Sunday School teacher, Y leader, scouter, etc.

34. If you needed some advice about what subjects to study in high school or college, or about what courses to choose, or how long to stay in school, and if you were allowed to pick ONLY ONE PERSON FROM THIS LIST, from which category would you choose that person?
A. a teacher
B. a guidance or vocational counselor
C. mother
D. father
E. older brother or sister
F. some other relative
G. friend your age
H. friend older than you
I. minister, priest, or rabbi
J. community leader, such as Sunday School teacher, Y leader, scouter, etc.